

VZCZCXRO4845
PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHWD #0303 2741101
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 301101Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY WINDHOEK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0087
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY PRIORITY

UNCLAS WINDHOEK 000303

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [WA](#)

SUBJECT: NAMIBIA: SWAPO ASSERTS STRENGTH IN LOCAL VOTE

¶1. (SBU) The Rally for Democracy and Progress' (RDP) second electoral challenge to Namibia's ruling and dominant South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO) fell considerably short of expectations on September 26. RDP only managed to win 123 votes to SWAPO's 1299 votes in the election for seven town council members in the small northern town of Omuthiya. Two other opposition parties, the Congress of Democrats (COD) and Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) picked up 26 and 5 votes respectively. The election gives SWAPO six of the seven town council seats, while RDP will control one.

¶2. (SBU) Both SWAPO and RDP campaigned intensely in Omuthiya. RDP leaders accused SWAPO supporters of using intimidation and violence in the run up to the election. The elections were first slated for February, but postponed until May, and then postponed a second time to September 26. The delays were mainly due to discrepancies in voter lists and the registration of both candidates and voters. Despite the administrative problems 82 percent of voters turned out on election day. While both parties made declarations of alleged irregularities on September 26, both seemed to be generally satisfied that the election had been free and fair.

¶3. (SBU) This was RDP's second election since long-time SWAPO insider Hidipo Hamutenya formed the party in November 2007. The party suffered a similar defeat in a March regional council by-election for the Eenhana Constituency in Ohangwena region. RDP managed only 289 votes to SWAPO's 4193 in that election. RDP supporters also alleged that SWAPO used intimidation and violence in the Eenhana election. The only other election since November 2007, which RDP did not contest, saw no allegations of politically motivated intimidation.

- - - -
Comment
- - - -

¶4. (SBU) Hamutenya's popularity and his ties to the Omuthiya region (where he owns property) were thought to give RDP a strong chance to pull votes from SWAPO in the September 26 vote. But voters in northern Namibia have a strong sentimental attachment to SWAPO. Northerners (and even more specifically the Oshivambo region where Omuthiya is located) bore the brunt of the struggle for independence from South Africa, and SWAPO is widely viewed as their liberating party. Communities in northern Namibia are generally considered very conservative and traditionally intolerant of dissent, making it difficult even for someone of Hamutenya's stature to organize in the region. Opposition party supporters in northern Namibia are generally stigmatized and ostracized from their communities. It appears RDP simply pulled votes from the traditional opposition parties but few from SWAPO.

¶5. (SBU) It now appears that RDP's challenge to SWAPO) if it can mount an effective one - will have to come from the more urban areas around the country. RDP will have its first chance at an "urban election" on October 31. That is the date of the next scheduled election in Tobias Hainyeko constituency, an informal settlement outside Windhoek. The

RDP has its work cut out for it, as Tobias Hainyeko has tended to heavily favor SWAPO in the past. End Comment.
HARRINGTON